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ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Written statement submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[15 February 1999]

Disregard of the cultural rights of the Sorbian people in Germany

1. Since the reunification of Germany, the Society for Threatened Peoples has observed with concern growing repression and disregard of the cultural rights of the long-established (autochthonous) national minority of Sorbs in Germany.

2. A western Slav people, the Sorbs have lived in the area of Lusatia in the territory of the eastern German states of Sachsen and Brandenburg, since the sixth century. Sixty thousand people claim Sorbian origins, only half of them still speaking the language of their ancestors. A study made by the European Commission counts Sorbian as one of the European languages threatened with extinction.

3. Less than 10 years after German reunification, the German Government, under the leadership of former Chancellor Helmut Kohl, began dismantling the measures taken to protect the language and culture of the Sorbs. Instead of undertaking strengthened efforts to save the Sorbian language, the Government halved the subsidy for the Foundation for the Sorbian People (Stiftung für das sorbische Volk). Because the Foundation maintains the majority of the organizations of the Sorbian people in the fields of education and culture, Sorbian schools, nursery schools, media, etc. are threatened with closure.

4. The settlements of the Sorbian people continue to be threatened with destruction by the quarrying of brown coal. Already in the period of the German Democratic Republic, which suffered a chronic shortage of raw materials, numerous Sorbian villages had been torn down recklessly, and residents were forcibly resettled because they stood in the way of the mining of brown coal. This process is being continued in the Federal Republic of Germany. Although the Sorbian settlements enjoy special protection in the constitution of the state of Brandenburg, the Brandenburg parliament passed a special law on the extraction of brown coal on 11 June 1997, permitting the electrical company RWE to tear down Sorbian villages which were found in the way of the operations of the open-cast mine. The German-Sorbian village of Horno (German)/Rogow (Sorbian) was dissolved on 27 September 1998.

5. The Society for Threatened Peoples appeals to the Commission on Human Rights to demand a stop to the disregard of the rights of the Sorbian people in Germany and

(a) Demand that the German Government take active measures and strengthened efforts to save the Sorbian people;

(b) Call upon the German Government to maintain the Foundation for the Sorbian People and to revise its decision to cut its subsidies;

(c) Call upon the German Government to respect the traditional settlement areas of the Sorbian people and to preserve the German-Sorbian village of Horno/Rogow.